THE THEATRE OF TODAY
EDITED BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

TWELVE THOUSAND

BY

BRUNO FRANK

PUBLISHED BY ALFRED · A · KNOPF

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THE THEATRE OF TODAY

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SIGNIFICANT IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF MODERN DRAMA

Edited, and each with a preface, by
GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

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THE THEATRE OF TODAY

EDITED BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

TWELVE THOUSAND

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS BY

BRUNO FRANK

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

WILLIAM A. DRAKE

NEW YORK

ALFRED·A·KNOPF

1928

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tD763

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ORIGINAL TITLE

ZWÖLFTAUSEND

SCHAUSPIEL IN DREI AKTEN

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FOREWORD

THE PLAY here presented to you, by the talented author of "The Days of the King" and "Trenck," is especially noteworthy for its engaging simplicity. Out of this simplicity, it seems to me, there is born an eloquence uncommon to the bulk of drama being written in Germany in these years, for German playwrights, many of them otherwise commendable, have latterly affected a complexity and deviousness that torture their meanings and intentions out of all recognizability. Expressionism, impressionism, extravagant symbolism, far-fetched fantasy, technique that is a denial of technique, madly mechanistic stages, nightmare scenic investiture and syncopated dramaturgy have, since the war, engulfed the Germanic theatre, until today simple, straightforward and plainly pointed dramatic writing has become something of a curiosity there. In this juncture, such a play as "Twelve Thousand" achieves much of its mark by contrast.

Having naught to do with the strained technical innovations favorite among the German dramatists of the present era, Frank dips his pen into good, old-fashioned ink and writes what he has to write with an unposturing directness and a winning clarity.

In the midst of the pervading Tollerism and Unruhism, for all their periodic virtue, in the midst of the pervading welter of Drehbühne and Treppenbühne drama, for all its periodic virtue in turn, a play as tranquilly evolved and as artlessly composed as this has the air of a sudden violin in a jazz hullaballoo. And its sincerity and its emotion drift easily and naturally—and very forcibly—out of the relatively placid text.

Among the many plays produced in Germany since the war, this is one that will interest the Anglo-American peculiarly because of the nature of its theme. The majority of recent German plays deal with conditions perhaps more piquant to Germans themselves than to the generality of theatregoers of other nations. German labor indignations, German post-war alarms, German spiritual perplexities and like subjects have occupied German dramatists almost exclusively. Frank, too, turns his eyes into Germany, but it is a Germany of another century, and in those delving, scrutinizing, philosophic eyes there is a vivid reflection of a new land across the seas and of the omen of a meaningful future, at once its own and a modern Germany's. And so the curtain rises on this tale of a Germany of other days, this tale, in a way, of an England then too, and this tale of an America that lay struggling and kicking in its cradle over the far waters.

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

CHARACTERS

IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

PIDERIT *Confidential Secretary to the Prince.*

MARTIN, KARL } *Peasant Conscripts for America. His Brothers.*

FAUCITT *The Prince's Minister.*

TREYSA *Envoy Plenipotentiary of His Majesty, George III, King of England.*

HIS SERENE HIGHNESS *The Prince of . . .*

THE BARONESS OF SPANGENBURG *Daughter of the People and the Prince's Mistress.*

A PRUSSIAN COLONEL.

SCENE:

A summer pavilion in the garden of a German ducal palace.

TIME:

The epoch of the American Revolution.

ACT ONE *Monday afternoon.*

ACT TWO *Friday, early evening.*

ACT THREE *Saturday evening.*

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

Throughout the entire play, the stage represents a room in the summer pavilion lying in the garden adjacent to the palace. It is the cabinet of the PRINCE; *in particular, the office of his confidential secretary,* PIDERIT. *The furnishings of the room are better suited to a salon than to a place where business is transacted. Beside the desk of the secretary is another table: there are also several couches. On the wall, a huge, full-length portrait of the sovereign. On the left, a large window. On the right, a door; and in the centre, another broad door, which opens upon the gardens of the palace. Neither door is of glass.*

When the curtain rises, PIDERIT *is seen working at his desk. He is a man in his middle thirties, dressed without ostentation, but in a manner suggesting his distinguished position.*

His two BROTHERS *enter furtively from the left. They are peasants, who have put on their best frock-coats. The elder is tall, sturdy, blatant, and meddlesome. The younger is much more quiet and mild in his manner, and apparently a little feeble-minded.*

ELDER BROTHER: Ho, there, Wilhelm!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Pst!

PIDERIT: What do you mean by coming here? You know that I am occupied at this hour.

ELDER BROTHER: That doesn't matter.

PIDERIT: Well, what is amiss?

YOUNGER BROTHER: The Commissioner has been to see us.

PIDERIT: What Commissioner?

ELDER BROTHER: The *cursed* Commissioner!

PIDERIT: Cursed?

ELDER BROTHER: The Military Commissioner!

YOUNGER BROTHER: And he wrote down our names!

PIDERIT: But he couldn't do that! You don't have to serve. You have bought your freedom from the army.

ELDER BROTHER: We've bought nothing at all! The freedoms have been cancelled!

PIDERIT: Did he say that?

ELDER BROTHER: He didn't say much, except that he was to take down the names of all mature men.

YOUNGER BROTHER: All the people are talking about it! The whole country is in an uproar!

PIDERIT: Speak more calmly!

ELDER BROTHER: You can talk! Nothing will happen to you!

PIDERIT: Speak more calmly, I say! You don't read the Prince's private correspondence, as I do. And I read the newspapers, too! And let me tell you this—there is absolutely no need of any soldiers, in these days. There is peace throughout Europe.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yes—in Europe!

PIDERIT: In Europe? Ah! Is *that* what the people are saying?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Exactly!

ELDER BROTHER: The people are saying that the sixteen thousand soldiers the Prince sold last year to the English weren't enough. The English need more soldiers.

YOUNGER BROTHER: And the Prince needs more money!

ELDER BROTHER: They say that everything is going wrong in America. None of the Americans want to have anything more to do with the English King. They want to secede. They want to be free.

PIDERIT: That's nothing new.

ELDER BROTHER: The English agent is traveling round Germany, from one Prince to another, buying up fresh cannon-fodder.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Us! Us!

PIDERIT: If all this were true, I should know of it. No papers are made out in this palace except by my own hand.

ELDER BROTHER: They are still bargaining!

PIDERIT: I don't believe it. And in any event, there is still time.

ELDER BROTHER: Time? Not much time! At any moment, they may send us the order to join the regiment.

PIDERIT: They won't do that. Our parents are dead. There would be no one left on the farm.

ELDER BROTHER: Then they'll spit on it. I suppose

strangers will go about nights, shouting over the fields!

PIDERIT: Shouting over the fields?

ELDER BROTHER: Yes! You've become such an elegant person, Wilhelm, that you don't know the condition of the farmers.

PIDERIT: What do you mean? Shouting over the fields?

YOUNGER BROTHER: You know, Wilhelm, that we aren't allowed to do anything to injure the game, which is kept for the courtiers to shoot when they go hunting. So we must shout.

ELDER BROTHER: No one is permitted to take a gun or a stick along with him to the fields, so that by no chance might anything injure the noble deer and the hares. So there's nothing left but for one to run round the fields at night, clapping his hands and shouting aloud. Otherwise, there'd be no crops. Perhaps *you'll* go out at night and shout, when we are gone! Eh, Wilhelm?

PIDERIT: That won't be necessary. Things won't go that far. The country has to be built up. That also is in the interest of the State.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Of course! Who else would pay taxes to the Prince for the new castle he is building!

ELDER BROTHER: And for his Spanish horses!

YOUNGER BROTHER: And for his Italian dancers!

ELDER BROTHER: And for his golden sleighs!

YOUNGER BROTHER: And for the Spangenberg!

ELDER BROTHER: The Spangenberg! Even she might have to suffer in the end, and bathe in water instead

of sheep's milk. No, it were better to let the Indians take our scalps and use them as handkerchiefs!

PIDERIT: Pst!

ELDER BROTHER: Pst! Always pst! Can't you say anything but that? You're afraid, eh, Wilhelm? Well, that is why I am telling you all this! He steals, he betrays, he sells our blood!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Be quiet, Martin! You are in his house!

ELDER BROTHER: His house is built of our bodies. The stones are our flesh, and the mortar is our blood. He pays badly—a niggardly wage! Do you still remember? Four years ago—August Grimminger! . . .

PIDERIT: Now you must go!

ELDER BROTHER: Don't you remember any more, Wilhelm? August Grimminger was a chimney-sweep, and he happened to be on the roof when His Highness was passing by with his woman. It was not the Spangenberg then, but the one before her—the one from Paris, whom the King of France had cast aside. She spies the sooty fellow on the roof and says, in jest: What fun it would be, if he were to tumble down! His Highness is gallant; he will provide that amusement for her at once. And so he shoots him down. How the widow shrieked afterwards, when he gave her five taler! That was a noble deed, you must confess! For such a ruler, one is only too happy to go across the ocean! One can't restrain oneself from shouting for him with all one's might!

Come, Karl, join in! Long life to our Sovereign Prince! Hail! Hail! Hail!

[FAUCITT *and the* MINISTER *emerge from the park.*]

MINISTER: There! You can hear, Mr. Faucitt, how the people regard their Prince!

FAUCITT: I hear.

MINISTER: And you still fear complications? You don't know our people!

FAUCITT: So it would seem! I am wrong to measure them according to English standards. In England, we can't risk a general uprising, although the fight against the American rebels is entirely our own responsibility. And that is why we are obliged to pay out so much money to buy foreign soldiers.

MINISTER: So much money, Mr. Faucitt! I beg your pardon! Very little money! But let us not begin that over again.

FAUCITT: No!

MINISTER [*to* PIDERIT]: Who are these two fellows?

PIDERIT: They are . . .

ELDER BROTHER: We are . . .

MINISTER: Silence! [*to* PIDERIT.] What are these fellows doing in your office?

PIDERIT: Your Excellency, the people are restless. There is a rumour that there is to be a new draft.

MINISTER: Well?

ELDER BROTHER: Your Honour, we wanted . . .

YOUNGER BROTHER: Your Honour, we are . . .

MINISTER: You want, you are! You are stinking peas-

ants, and you have no right to want anything! Did the Commissioner take your names?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yes.

MINISTER: Then you have been chosen, and you shall go to America. [*To* FAUCITT.] By a fortunate coincidence, Mr. Faucitt, I am able immediately to show you two specimens, without the possibility of suspicion that they are specially selected. Please convince yourself. All of our stock is like this! A strong, unspoiled, sound, courageous race, whose equal you will find nowhere else. [*To* ELDER BROTHER.] Put out your arm! [MINISTER *feels the arm.*] There is muscle for you! Just feel this, Mr. Faucitt!

FAUCITT: Thanks.

MINISTER [*to* YOUNGER BROTHER]: Your calf! [*To* FAUCITT.] Now, this will certainly convince you! Hard as rock! If these fellows had your marvelous Yorkshire beef every day, they could not be better fed. I wish that your Minister in London were here to feel this leg. This whole business would be settled forthwith! Really, now, Mr. Faucitt, we will deliver to you the best of our country!

FAUCITT: That is your business.

MINISTER [*to the* BROTHERS]: Get out! Quick! And don't stir out of your homes, until you are called! [*To* ELDER BROTHER.] Why do you stare at me, fellow? Just try and run away! The borders have been watched since last night. Whoever gets caught, runs the gauntlet! Get out!

[*The* BROTHERS *go out at the Right.*]

FAUCITT: Can we speak before this man?

MINISTER: Secretary Piderit is sworn to secrecy. All business goes through his hands.

FAUCITT: Good. Well, to repeat—I shall inspect the whole crew, here on the spot.

MINISTER: Mr. Faucitt, you yourself just saw . . .

FAUCITT: Those were only two. We are buying twelve thousand.

MINISTER: For what reason do you suspect us?

FAUCITT: I have my reasons. Please don't forget that this is the second time that I have been here! Your shipment last year was of unequal quality, and to a large degree, useless.

MINISTER: I beg your pardon!

FAUCITT: Absolutely! The stuff that was shown to me, here at the palace, was energetic material. The majority, however, who were not shown to me until we had reached the port of embarkation, were simply refuse. Small fellows, badly built, and many of them too young. It is no wonder that the American rebels beat us, and laugh at us in the bargain.

MINISTER: I am terribly sorry.

FAUCITT: That is past.

MINISTER [*relieved*]: Yes, that is past! Now, you shall soon have your new soldiers—and we shall have something else! Piderit, take down this agreement: Between His Majesty, the King of Great Britain, and His Highness, the Prince of—and so forth and so forth. Got it?

PIDERIT: Yes.

MINISTER: The following agreement has been concluded. Article One: His Highness, the Prince, cedes to His Royal Majesty, a military force of twelve thousand men—twelve thousand written out—healthy, strong people, well armed and well clothed, to be freely employed according to his wishes, in Europe, America, or wherever else it may please His Royal Majesty.

PIDERIT: Royal Majesty. . . .

MINISTER: Article Two: His Royal Majesty will pay to His Highness the sum of fifty taler per soldier, a taler being reckoned at the rate of three shillings sixpence.

FAUCITT: The sixpence is to be omitted.

MINISTER: Impossible! That is the current quotation!

FAUCITT: Round figures! [*To* PIDERIT.] Three shillings!

MINISTER: Unthinkable! His Highness would never forgive me!

FAUCITT: Nor would the Parliament of England forgive me!

MINISTER: Just think! We are selling our flesh and blood!

FAUCITT: Your conscience will not stumble over differences of exchange quotations.

MINISTER: The marrow of our land! For an affair that has nothing to do with us!

FAUCITT: Enough!

MINISTER: Let us agree!

FAUCITT: No!

MINISTER: Three shillings fourpence.

FAUCITT: No!

MINISTER: Three shillings threepence!

FAUCITT: No!

MINISTER: Three shillings twopence!

FAUCITT: The devil! No! And if this doesn't stop, I'll get into my carriage and drive on one house further. I understand that there are two hundred Princes in Germany!

MINISTER: Very well, then. But it makes my heart bleed!

FAUCITT: That is an insufficient reason. Secretary! Article Three!

MINISTER: *I'll* dictate!

FAUCITT: No, *I'll* dictate this one! The pay of the German soldiers will be the same as that of the English troops. But the German soldiers will be paid directly in America, and not through the Prince's Treasury.

MINISTER: That is impossible!

FAUCITT: Necessary and indispensable!

MINISTER: How so?

FAUCITT: My dear Sir, do I have to tell you that? Because it has so happened in the past that the Prince's Treasury has stolen half of the soldiers' pay. For that reason! We do not wish the German soldiers to feel injured in comparison with the Englishmen, and to fight less well on that account.

MINISTER: I protest!

FAUCITT: I am going!

MINISTER: You are insulting His Highness!

FAUCITT: A fig for him! Yes or no!

MINISTER: Very well, then.

FAUCITT [*after a short pause*]: I realise quite well, my dear Minister, that it may be construed as an insult that I am forced to protect these purchased soldiers against their seller, their own Fatherland. I have nothing to conceal. In London, these facts are the gossip of the day. [*To* PIDERIT.] You need not put that upon record. Article Four: This agreement shall become effective upon the embarkation of the last soldier.

MINISTER: Why not until then? Why not at once?

FAUCITT: I will explain that to you. [*With emphasis.*] Because we fear difficulties!

MINISTER: Difficulties?

FAUCITT: Yes, difficulties! Serious difficulties!

[*The* PRINCE *approaches, from the direction of the garden. The* MINISTER *and* PIDERIT *bow low;* FAUCITT *slightly.*]

PRINCE [*fifty and well preserved*]: Difficulties? I heard some one speak of difficulties. What kind of difficulties?

MINISTER [*with uncertainty*]: Your Serene Highness —Mr. Faucitt thinks, Mr. Faucitt fears—

PRINCE [*impatiently*]: What?

FAUCITT [*bluntly*]: That the King of Prussia may prevent our passage through his territory.

PRINCE [*more loudly*]: What?

FAUCITT: The transportation of your troops must take place by the river. The river flows through Prussian territory. The King can prohibit the passage.

PRINCE: Let him dare!

FAUCITT: He has dared it. At the Lock of Hanau, at the Lock of Zerbst! And for that reason . . .

PRINCE: What?

FAUCITT: The conclusion is clear.

PRINCE: Am I your syllogist?

FAUCITT: For that reason, Your Highness, we can make no payments until the last man is on board the English ships.

PRINCE: Sir, do you not forget with whom you are negotiating?

FAUCITT: Your Highness, my instructions!

PRINCE: They are insulting!

FAUCITT: They are commercial!

PRINCE: Am I the sovereign here, or am I not?

FAUCITT: In your country—yes.

PRINCE: Your master, the King of England, understands nothing of the absolute power of a German Prince.

FAUCITT: Of course not, Your Highness! Not for the last hundred years!

PRINCE: He is dependent upon his Parliament, his Ministers; upon a so-called public opinion. Everything is quite different here. My country lies upon my open hand. I shut my fist and enclose it. I can order all things according to my own judgment.

FAUCITT [*with a kind of dry irony*]: Your Highness, that is well known. Every one of the two hundred German landlords can do the same—within the boundaries of his own territory.

PRINCE: My dear Mr. Faucitt, do you know what the word Sovereignty means? It means the right of life and death as, in the true, original family, the father of the house once possessed it over his sons and daughters!

MINISTER: May I be indulged one interjection, Your Highness? That is not the question in dispute!

PRINCE [*not heeding him*]: The Kings of England have allowed this absolute father-right, the true authority, to be wrested from their hands. What is the result? Insurrection! The country across the sea threatens secession and takes up arms; and because the King is not master in his own house, the English people refuse to follow him to war, and our sons, my sons, the sons of a true autocrat, must go over the sea to maintain his rights! I accept my duty; I give you my men, with pride . . .

FAUCITT [*impatiently*]: With profit, Your Highness! [*And, as the* PRINCE *makes a gesture of anger.*] Let us bring this discussion back to a commercial basis, if you please. [*With decision.*] I repeat, payment on board!

MINISTER [*pacifically*]: Sir, won't you take into consideration the fact that not a soul in Potsdam knows of our plans? And we, Mr. Faucitt, are certainly not going to tell the King about it!

FAUCITT: Everybody in this country will know of it tomorrow!

PRINCE: My cautious negotiator! On Monday, we shall put it in writing. On Saturday, the troops will march out. It would require three days for an express messenger to reach Berlin. My borders are guarded; now they are also being closely watched against possible deserters. No message can cross them, except such as are sealed in the palace. How in the world is the King of Prussia to be informed?

FAUCITT: Very well, then. I am satisfied. Payment upon mobilisation.

MINISTER: Exchange on London?

FAUCITT: Six hundred thousand taler on London.

PRINCE: My gratitude shall not forget you.

FAUCITT: I demand nothing.

PRINCE: You would not refuse a gift?

FAUCITT: I have no desires.

MINISTER: We may hope, Mr. Faucitt, that in future you will consider us before any others.

FAUCITT [*very reserved*]: We hope to end the war soon.

PRINCE: One always hopes that!

[*The* BARONESS SPANGENBERG *enters from the garden. She is a beautiful, stately woman, in her middle twenties; healthy, brilliant, and gay. Every one bows. The* PRINCE *kisses her hand respectfully.*]

PRINCE: You have come to pay us a visit at our business? You are very kind!

BARONESS: It is my great pleasure, Your Highness, to

find you. In reality, I was looking for the one whose house this is. [*She glances at* PIDERIT, *and nods.*] We often work here together. Don't we, Piderit?

PRINCE: Ah!

BARONESS: Piderit is my private secretary, just as he is yours. And if Your Highness is as well satisfied with him as I am, he is to be congratulated. There is not a good dressmaker in Paris whose address he does not know; not a lace dealer in Brussels; not a jeweler in Vienna. I recommend Herr Piderit for advancement.

PRINCE: My lady, this gentleman has not had the pleasure of being presented to you.

BARONESS: You must forgive my negligence.

PRINCE [*presenting him*]: Mr. Faucitt, Plenipotentiary of His Majesty, the King of Great Britain.

FAUCITT [*very unceremoniously*]: How do you do?

BARONESS: Welcome, my lord! I trust that the Royal Family are in good health?

FAUCITT: I do not often have the privilege of seeing them. And, by the way, I am not a lord.

BARONESS [*exchanging an amused glance with* PRINCE]: Oh!

MINISTER: In honour of the Plenipotentiary, there will be a large garden festival on Friday. The Chief Steward will have the privilege of presenting you with the program of the day.

BARONESS: Well, I hope he has thought up something new. His programs are all the same. They send you to sleep on your feet!

PRINCE: I shall report that to him. And now we will leave you to work with your secretary. Order as much as you like! Although, of course, perfect beauty is incapable of improvement!

BARONESS: Ah, perfect beauty! Whenever I pass the Titian in our little gallery, I turn my head aside, so that I may not have to be ashamed of myself.

PRINCE: My lady, the picture is immovable; otherwise, it would be for it to turn aside!

MINISTER [*in a whisper*]: Ravishing!

[FAUCITT *makes a little grimace.*]

PRINCE: Well, set yourself to work on your orders. Adorn yourself! Whatever we can afford is at your feet. [*Taking his leave.*] My beautiful one! [*Goes off by the garden door.*]

[*The* MINISTER *wishes ceremoniously to give* FAUCITT *the right of precedence.* FAUCITT *pays no attention to him, and passes by him indifferently.*]

BARONESS: Well, thank God, Piderit, the Englishman is gone! What a lout he is! [*Mimics him.*] "How do you do?" How could the Prince be so patient with him?

PIDERIT: My lady, he is the envoy of a foreign power.

BARONESS: What has England to do with us, the whale with the mouse? I can't imagine! [PIDERIT *says nothing.*] Oh, I beg your pardon, Piderit. You are the most discreet of all confidential secretaries. However, I can ask about it a couple of levels higher up.

PIDERIT: To be sure, my lady. You will learn about it anyhow.

BARONESS: But what manners! If that is the tone of the Court of Saint James! Imagine a Frenchman with such manners! "How do you do?" [*She laughs;* PIDERIT *remains silent.*] Well, listen! I've written my small orders on this slip. Carminati of Venice recently offered me a diamond necklace. Do you remember?

PIDERIT: Yes, of course.

BARONESS: I thought it was too expensive. That was stupid of me. Between us, Piderit, I am still somewhat afraid of large sums. That is not really necessary.

PIDERIT: Absolutely not.

BARONESS: Well, to come to the point, let him send it. But he must take off a hundred ducats. He figured that in, anyhow. And probably more.

PIDERIT: My lady, I should advise you not to bargain. It is more princely not to do so.

BARONESS: But it is foolish!

PIDERIT: More princely, however. Likewise, more in the manner of His Highness. There is plenty here. All the sources are streaming with gold.

BARONESS: Then Hemmelmans, in Brussels. That house has marvelous lace! I have had an idea, Piderit! Three coats, one over the other, made of Mechelner point-lace! What do you think? It would be novel and beautiful.

PIDERIT: It would be ravishing, although your beauty does not require so much lace. "If the Titian were not painted, it would be for her to turn away." That was enchanting, from a Prince!

BARONESS: Yes, very beautiful. It is from Molière.

PIDERIT: Where else shall I write?

BARONESS: Now, Piderit, comes the most important commission of all! Do you know who is in Berlin? Aubignac!

PIDERIT: Impossible! Aubignac dresses the hair of the Queen of France, at Versailles. How would he get to Berlin?

BARONESS: It is a fact. He is living at the "Golden Hat."

PIDERIT: But how can that be possible! How could Her Most Christian Majesty permit herself to be separated from her ingenious hairdresser!

BARONESS: He is in disgrace, Piderit. Think of the opportunity! And the stupid fellow went to Berlin! I can't imagine why. Perhaps he fancies that King Frederick will engage him to plait his pigtail! Piderit, we must secure him!

PIDERIT: Ah, that is a scheme! It inspires me! Aubignac, the author of the art of "Dressing a Lady's Hair According to Her Individuality"! Aubignac, who has spent two hours every day in private conference with the Queen of France! But how is it possible that he has fallen!

BARONESS: I know that, too. He committed treason. He showed the Duchesse de Fleury a new style, and

at the big Trianon festival, she outdid the Queen. He composed a frigate into her hair!

PIDERIT: A frigate? But a frigate is a ship!

BARONESS: Yes, that is right; a dainty little ship, fashioned of silk, lace, and diamonds. It is said to have been enchanting. But do you know, Piderit, I should not care to wear it.

PIDERIT: Thank God, my lady! I am often grieved to see you conceal your beautiful hair under silvery powder and ornaments. But what makes you want Aubignac?

BARONESS: You are stupid, Piderit; stupid, like all men! I need him, in order that every one may know of it! In Dresden, in Hanover, in Stuttgart, in Vienna! Every one must know that I have the great Aubignac in my service. It will be for me what a high decoration is for a man. And then, he is very cheap.

PIDERIT: Really?

BARONESS: Thirty thousand taler a year.

PIDERIT: Nothing at all!

BARONESS: You think it is too much? You yourself have only now advised me not to haggle!

PIDERIT [*hesitates; an idea seems to strike him; his expression changes*]: No, no! It is not too much.

BARONESS: I know, of course, how men always laugh at women's finery. But you men are wrong. Look, Piderit! A man can go round in a worn coat, and be honoured for his deeds. But we women are what we appear to be! A diamond ornament is as much to us as a battle won.

PIDERIT [*occupied with his own thoughts*]: I know it, my lady. And I gladly serve under your victorious banner. I shall write at once to Berlin.

BARONESS: And when can he be here?

PIDERIT [*immersed in his thoughts*]: Who?

BARONESS: Who? Aubignac!

PIDERIT: Oh, yes, the coiffeur! It takes three days to make the journey.

BARONESS: Three days there and three days back—that is too long! He must be here on Friday!

PIDERIT: You are right. The troops are marching on Saturday.

BARONESS: The troops?

PIDERIT: My lady, I mean on the day before the Prince gives his festival celebration.

BARONESS [*laughing*]: You are more clever than I thought, Piderit! You have guessed it. Yes, the Prince is to be surprised! I want to have my hair dressed by Aubignac on Friday.

PIDERIT: Marvelous! And perhaps you want to have a frigate in your hair!

BARONESS: What makes you think of that?

PIDERIT: It would be so very appropriate—a ship!

BARONESS: I don't understand.

PIDERIT: I beg your pardon, my lady! It was merely a jest.

[*During the last minute, military music has been approaching. Drums and fifes are heard, becoming louder and louder. It is now very close. Neither this*

music, nor the music in the Second Act, is to be Prussian marches.]

BARONESS [*at the window*]: Soldiers? Grenadiers, infantry! Is there to be a review today?

PIDERIT [*carelessly*]: I have not been informed.

BARONESS: And so many! One can't see the end! What is it for? I thought we were living in a state of peace!

PIDERIT: *We*—yes!

BARONESS: Ah, officers! I know some of them! Ah! Ditfurth—Donop—Minnegerode! How handsome! [*She waves her hand gaily.*] How is it that they are doing service? Our officers so seldom serve!

PIDERIT: I suppose they must, now.

BARONESS [*lightly*]: Oh, I understand! Of course! Soldiers for America! And how many are there, this time?

PIDERIT: I don't know exactly. Just a few regiments. But come, my lady, I think it would be better if you did not stand so close to the window. You ought not to be seen.

BARONESS: Me? Why not?

PIDERIT: One cannot expect every peasant to understand the ways of statecraft.

BARONESS: You mean that these people might be angered against me? How absurd! What have I to do with the affairs of the Prince?

PIDERIT: Nothing at all. But these people lack philosophy.

BARONESS [*recoiling*]: You are right! There is a man

threatening me with his fist! Ah, that is good! The corporal is beating his face! Unbelievable!

PIDERIT: Unbelievable! Such a scoundrel ought to be in prison!

BARONESS: One must not be unjust. It is possible that some of these people do not wish to leave their Fatherland.

PIDERIT: You are jesting, my lady. Who likes to go about at night, shouting in the fields!

BARONESS: What does that mean?

PIDERIT: It is merely an expression. Too little is done to enlighten the people. They ought to be led through the palace. What would they see there? A beautiful edifice, pleasantly laid-out gardens, marvelous statues. In order that this epitome of a high culture may be completed, a few minor sacrifices are not too much to demand.

BARONESS [*still not particularly moved*]: Are these sacrifices necessary?

PIDERIT: Always! But it is only those who do not understand, who speak of sacrifices. As if these people could be so happy at home! Is it a pleasant prospect, to grow old as a dull peasant, and to die a sweaty death in a mouldy bed? Your pardon for so expressing myself, my lady!

BARONESS [*still looking on*]: There are some very young men among them—almost children. Aren't they too weak?

PIDERIT: Oh, the race is tough in this part of the country. [*He steps up to her.*] My lady, in order to en-

joy happiness, one must bear a strong heart in one's breast. For my part, the thought makes me stagger. Tap, tap, tap—three rows, five soldiers to each row; that is a splendid gown for you, my lady! Tap, tap, tap—ten rows of five soldiers each; there is a bit of jewelry, set with diamonds, for a most beautiful forehead! Tap, tap, tap—forty rows of fives; there is a little castle, with a park and statues and little ponds! It is quite exciting and very marvelous to see how the delicate, sensitive plant of your beautiful life grows up out of such base earth!

BARONESS: You are a good talker, Piderit.

PIDERIT: It makes me happy to think that the affection of our Prince, which he was formerly accustomed to bestow upon French and English ladies, has turned for the first time, and doubtless now for ever, upon a lady of his own country. I might say, the most beautiful daughter of his people. But perhaps I have been too bold . . .

BARONESS: Not at all, Piderit. My father was the watchmaker Rapp, of Spangenberg. Every one knows that.

PIDERIT: Every one knows it, and every one is proud of it.

BARONESS: Including the fellow who threatened me, just a moment ago? He had an alarming expression on his face.

PIDERIT [*dismissing the thought*]: A fool!

BARONESS: I really haven't any desire left for our purchases.

PIDERIT: But, my gracious lady! . . .

BARONESS: In any case, we'll forget about Aubignac.

PIDERIT [*decisively*]: No, not that, by any means! You know, my lady, what great pride the Prince takes in displaying to the world in what princely fashion he can fulfill all your desires.

BARONESS [*rather feebly*]: Yes, yes!

PIDERIT: If I may say so, it is a matter of prestige. No, I shall write at once. Aubignac must come. I should be very sorry if this affair were not to pass through my hands.

BARONESS: Very well, then, write, Piderit! One can always let him go afterwards. Thirty thousand taler —that is a great deal of money!

PIDERIT [*gently*]: A great deal of money? I beg your pardon, my lady—six hundred soldiers!

BARONESS: Whatever you do, you are to write secretly! The surprise must be complete. Not a word to a soul!

PIDERIT: My lady, you know that I can be trusted. I shall write to him in the most secret manner. There is just one difficulty . . .

BARONESS [*hastily*]: A difficulty? Then let us abandon the matter.

PIDERIT: Oh, not an important one. It will be easy to overcome. As usual, in days of recruiting, the borders are being watched. All the mails are censored. Only letters sealed in the palace go through untouched. Now, the Privy Councellor Seyderhelm has the Prince's seal . . .

BARONESS: Don't be foolish. Seyderhelm must know

nothing of this! He talks too much. No, Piderit, I'll let you have my ring again, as I did before. Of course, they will respect my seal?

PIDERIT [*bowing*]: They would most certainly respect the Clasp and the Star. As surely as the arms of the Prince.

BARONESS [*satisfied*]: Good! Here is the ring. [*She draws her ring from her finger and gives it to* PIDERIT.] And you really think he can be here on Friday?

PIDERIT [*clutching the ring in his fist*]: Depend on it! Depend on it!

BARONESS: Splendid! [*She goes to the door, stops abruptly, and is on the point of saying something further*]: Piderit . . .

PIDERIT [*sedulously*]: My lady?

BARONESS: Nothing. [*She waves her hand, and goes.*]

[*The* BARONESS *has no sooner departed than* PIDERIT *visibly undergoes a complete transformation. Instead of the polite secretary, there appears a bitter man who has arrived at the limit of his endurance. He holds the ring before his eyes and mumbles:*] "Depend on it! Depend on it!" [*Then he stands reflecting. The rhythmical marching step is heard again; now it is quite close. He hurries to the window and looks down; then, with an overpowering determination, in great haste, he closes both the doors, hastens to his desk, seats himself, brushes all the papers, all the contracts, to the floor with a sweep of his arm, takes a fresh sheet of paper, dips his pen in the ink-*

well, hesitates one final moment, hearkens to the rhythmical steps, then puts his pen to the paper and speaks:] "To His Majesty, the King of Prussia . . ."

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

It is nearly evening. PIDERIT, *alone, is at work. He seems agitated, looks round several times, and hesitates at his writing. A sound is heard at the side door. He jumps up, as if in expectation. His two* BROTHERS *slink in, circumspectly. They are dressed as soldiers, but are wearing slippers woven of straw.*

PIDERIT: Ah, you!

ELDER BROTHER: Yes, we! You were not expecting us?

YOUNGER BROTHER: You don't like our having come?

ELDER BROTHER: You wish we were already gone, eh?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We have not heard a single word from you, in all these days!

ELDER BROTHER: You denied us on Monday before the gentlemen, so that they should not by any means suspect that you had brothers here!

PIDERIT: Martin! Karl! I had my reasons for that!

ELDER BROTHER: We wish we might believe it!

YOUNGER BROTHER: What could those reasons be?

PIDERIT: I can't tell you.

ELDER BROTHER: No, of course not! You can't tell them to us. But when we are already gone down the river to the ocean, then you can tell them!

[PIDERIT *remains silent.*]

YOUNGER BROTHER: Say something!

PIDERIT: That would be to no purpose. Wait!

ELDER BROTHER: Wait! You are forever saying that, you miserable scoundrel! Wait! You told us on Monday to wait. And you said, "It cannot be." And "There is still time." Yes, there was time, then! But now it is Friday, and tomorrow we are to leave!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Then you will be happy, won't you, Wilhelm?

PIDERIT: Happy, happy! [*He takes a candlestick and holds it before his face.*] Look at me! Do I appear as if I were happy? Karl! Martin! You must believe me . . .

ELDER BROTHER: Did you pray for us?

PIDERIT: That would not help.

ELDER BROTHER: What, then? What? Certainly you must have some authority here, after having served that reprobate for so many years!

PIDERIT: If I were to beg of him, it would only make matters the worse.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Martin, perhaps that is true. Think of Beutler's mother!

PIDERIT: What happened to her?

YOUNGER BROTHER: She fell on her knees before the Prince, to beg that he should leave her only son here.

YOUNGER BROTHER: She is in prison.

PIDERIT: Brothers, I have done what I could. Help may come of it.

ELDER BROTHER: That will have to come soon, Wilhelm!

PIDERIT: Yes, it would have to come today.

ELDER BROTHER: It will not happen, Karl! It will not happen! But you and your pretty Prince must not imagine that everything is going to go off easily!

PIDERIT: You must not start any trouble!

ELDER BROTHER: No, you rascal! Not until we are on the ship, among the rats and the bilge water!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Some one has just told us how things are on the ship. Oh, Wilhelm, it is not pleasant! [*He begins to tell what he has heard.*]

ELDER BROTHER: Be quiet! *He* is not going away.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Let me be, Martin. He must be told. [*To* PIDERIT] You must know that, on the ship, things are like this: there is nothing but bacon and peas, and peas and bacon; but the bacon is five years old, and has rainbow colours on both edges, and only in the middle is there a little strip of white: and the ship's bread is full of worms, and it is often so hard that one has to break it with cannon-balls. And the water, Wilhelm, the water that has been treated with sulphur, and is so thick and mossy that it has to be strained before it can be drunk!

ELDER BROTHER: Hold your tongue! He is not interested in what we shall have to eat!

PIDERIT [*stands a little aside; after a short silence, he says softly*]: Are you going home now?

YOUNGER BROTHER: Why do you want to know that? Yes, we and a few hundred others are not needed tonight in the parade.

ELDER BROTHER: And they say it is going to be splen-

did! There wil be fireworks and music, and the regiments will march under red and green lights. But we have been given permission to go home, out of pure love of humanity.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Don't believe him, Wilhelm! It is only because we have no boots. Look! [*He shows him his foot.*] But we will not go home any more.

PIDERIT: Why not?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We have sold out.

PIDERIT: You have sold the farm? And so quickly?

ELDER BROTHER: We got a bad price, too. Only just enough to enable us to get a start somewhere else.

PIDERIT: Somewhere else?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We still have our two horses. We will get away on those tomorrow, if everything goes well.

PIDERIT: If everything goes well?

YOUNGER BROTHER: I'll tell you, Wilhelm. There is going to be a rebellion.

ELDER BROTHER [*interrupts him*]: Don't tell him! He will betray us.

PIDERIT [*painfully*]: Yes—I will betray you!

ELDER BROTHER: He is not so bad as that! See here, Wilhelm! Tomorrow, at one o'clock, just before our departure, it will begin. At a single command, the blow will be struck . . .

YOUNGER BROTHER [*carried away*]: We will attack all together! The cannons will be spiked; the government house will be locked up; we will open fire!

We will march out of the gate, and in five hours, we'll be free!

PIDERIT: You fools, you fools! Who is going to give you munitions? You are rushing into disaster! You are all insane!

[FAUCITT *and the* MINISTER *come in from the park.*]

MINISTER: Well, Piderit, is everything in order?

PIDERIT: The contracts are all drawn, Your Excellency.

MINISTER: What do these people want?

PIDERIT: They are petitioners, Your Excellency.

MINISTER: I would advise you, Piderit, to avoid suspicious society.

PIDERIT [*with pretended contempt*]: Society, Your Excellency!

MINISTER: There are restless heads in the country. Rebellious heads. The Commissioners have reported this to me.

PIDERIT: Children's heads, Your Excellency! Foolish heads!

ELDER BROTHER: What, what!

MINISTER: Not a word! Get out!

FAUCITT: Stop! Show me your feet! [*He raises the candelabra.*] Slippers made of straw? What does this mean? Are these people to march over the American rocks in that fashion?

MINISTER: Mr. Faucitt, you must consider the haste with which we have obeyed your monarch's desires. In such a short time, it has not been possible to take care of every detail.

FAUCITT: Soldiers in straw slippers! Why not chambermaids in house slippers? None of that!

MINISTER: There are only a few hundred of them. Later, when you see them all passing by . . .

FAUCITT: Is that to begin again? I am answerable to my Government!

MINISTER: You two get out! You will receive boots. [*The two hesitate for a moment. At a sign from* PIDERIT, *they slip out.*]

FAUCITT: My dear Minister, a little honesty, if I may beg it of you; a little loyalty! [*As the* MINISTER *attempts to interrupt.*] I shall speak first; then you, if you please! When I took sixteen thousand soldiers from you last year, how did they arrive at the ocean? Ragged and torn! We had to buy them new boots. The English Parliament was beside itself!

MINISTER: Oh, please, Mr. Faucitt! While we are speaking of that, the other shipment of boots were also bad. The merchants in Bristol seem to have made a pretty penny out of it.

FAUCITT: What do you mean?

MINISTER: I mean that the cases were not opened until they were halfway across the ocean. And what did we find? Worthless stuff; light, thin, ladies' shoes! [*A brief pause.*] So we'll let that matter rest?

FAUCITT: For good or ill. I am in haste.

MINISTER: You have had news from London?

FAUCITT: I don't need to have news from London, to know that England is engaged in a serious war.

MINISTER: Undoubtedly. Immense stretches of coast, endless deserts . . .

FAUCITT: Exactly.

MINISTER: And—and the idea!

FAUCITT: What?

MINISTER: Oh, yes, that is not an inconsiderable item! The force of an idea is not not on England's side. The American States are in the act of asserting their independence!

FAUCITT: Many rebels have done that!

MINISTER: My dear Faucitt, history is on the side of America!

FAUCITT: Keep to your business, Treysa, and leave philosophy alone! One does not make world politics out of bad dreams!

MINISTER: It is amusing to dream of the misfortune of others!

[*The* PRINCE *enters from the park.*]

PRINCE: That disgusting snuff-taker of Sans Souci has his ear to the ground all the time, but he has not heard our grass grow!

MINISTER: He is a pitiful figure, that Prussian.

FAUCITT: But for all that, Your Highness, he is the central focal point of Europe.

PRINCE: It is his plebeian ambition to be that.

MINISTER: In any case, he is certainly a dirty cynosure! A tobacco-stained cynosure! The most inelegant focal point anywhere to be seen!

PRINCE: Well, he doesn't concern us any more. I my-

self, Mr. Faucitt, will accompany the troops down the river to the ocean.

FAUCITT: I would advise you, Your Highness, to have the transport accompanied on both shores by a mounted guard.

PRINCE: That has been decided. Is there anything else?

FAUCITT: Yes. I would recommend that the guard ride with tested rifles.

PRINCE [*sharply ironical*]: You ought to have been a schoolmaster! You think of everything!

MINISTER: I don't agree! For my own part, I question the advisability of depleting the country of so many troops!

PRINCE: What do you mean by that? Are we living in Turkey?

MINISTER: Some signs of dissatisfaction have been observed.

PRINCE: Dissatisfaction? Here? You make me laugh!

MINISTER: Nevertheless . . .

PRINCE: Here is a pretty pair of rabbits! The one wants the guard to ride with tested rifles, and the other doesn't want me to let the guard ride at all!

MINISTER: Your Highness, the exchanged prisoners have raised trouble by their complaints. They have described the uncomfortable conditions of an American expedition . . .

PRINCE: Do you hear, Faucitt!

FAUCITT: It is too bad, Your Highness. England, unfortunately, is not in a position to make a picnic out of a Colonial war.

MINISTER: The men seem to be lacking in enthusiasm. The Commissioners report . . .

PRINCE: There are always some fools. Let them run the gauntlet!

FAUCITT: When there are only a few, of course!

PRINCE: And if there were hundreds!

FAUCITT: And thousands?

PRINCE: Well, Mr. Faucitt, we'll manage this. No one hereafter shall libel England's war in this part of the country!

FAUCITT: That is exactly what I want.

PRINCE: There will simply be no more prisoners here.

FAUCITT: That would depend upon the bravery with which your troops fight.

PRINCE: Not only that! No prisoners are to be sent back here any more!

FAUCITT: Not back here? Then where in the world are they to be sent?

PRINCE: The British Empire is large! [*To* PIDERIT] Add this paragraph, Secretary! [*Emphasizing every word.*] Absolutely no prisoner, no wounded man, no cripple! [*Carelessly.*] The dead may come back. If any one will take trouble to send them! The dead don't reason!

[*The* BARONESS *enters from the park.*]

PRINCE [*going to meet her*]: Ah, our wonderful one! How marvelous, how beautiful you look!

BARONESS: I have come too early. I am disturbing the business of war.

MINISTER [*somewhat laboriously*]: Venus disturbing

Mars? In mythology, it is the other way round!

BARONESS: Thanks, Treysa! Don't take the bread out of the court poet's mouth!

PRINCE: He gets hardly any. At least, that is what he insists. [*Laughs.*] He has recently complained because he receives only two hundred taler a year, while the ballet-master gets twenty thousand!

MINISTER: As if the two could be compared!

PRINCE: We shall compare them tonight. For one of them has done the prologue, and the other the ballet.

FAUCITT: Prologue? Ballet? I thought the troops were to be reviewed!

MINISTER: A delightful method has been found to unite the two. The Ocean Goddess welcomes our soldiers; the nymphs greet them playfully; and finally, by the light of torches and fireworks, the parade begins.

PRINCE [*to* FAUCITT]: We shall await you in our tent.

FAUCITT: I beg to be excused!

PRINCE: What! You are not going to review the troops?

FAUCITT: I shan't review the ballet, Your Highness. And as for the troops, I shall select a position where no detail will escape me. [*To the* MINISTER.] Not a boot, not a cape! [*To the* PRINCE.] And moreover, it seems to me both fitting and expedient that I should remain in obscurity on this occasion. [*He goes off.*]

BARONESS [*laughing*]: Fitting, as well as expedient! What pedants these Englishmen are!

PRINCE: That is my opinion. Well, we shall soon be rid

of him! Treysa, you will make all the necessary preparations for our journey?

MINISTER: Yes, Your Highness.

PRINCE: The best boat!

MINISTER: Yes, Your Highness.

PRINCE: For we are taking something very precious with us!

BARONESS: Oh, I am to go along?

PRINCE [*laughing*]: You are quick at guessing! But how will you feel, the only woman among so many thousand men?

BARONESS [*without reproach*]: You are in good spirits, Your Highness!

PRINCE: It shall not be said that I am ungenerous. I'd like to see another Prince who would take his goddess down to the sea, in order that she might wave farewell to his troops! All twelve thousand of them shall dream of you beneath their American tents. So, Treysa, see that nothing is lacking!

MINISTER: Yes, Your Highness.

PRINCE: Music on board, plenty of flowers, every comfort!

MINISTER: Yes, Your Highness.

PRINCE: The whole ship must resemble the boudoir of a beauty.

MINISTER: Yes, Your Highness.

BARONESS: He says that with such a gloomy look! What is the matter with you?

PRINCE: He has been too long in the company of that Englishman.

MINISTER: I must have a moment in private with you.

PRINCE: What have you to say to me now? You have been with me the entire day.

MINISTER: It must be in the presence of my lady!

BARONESS: Very well, very well, I am here!

MINISTER: It is a serious matter.

PRINCE: In God's name! Piderit, leave us!

MINISTER: The secretary can remain, also.

PRINCE: Do you wish to have it put on record?

BARONESS: I am perishing to hear what it is!

[PIDERIT *is in a state of great excitement, which he suppresses.*]

MINISTER: Your Highess, it is a question of a report from the patrol at Lengenau. An express messenger has got through there!

PRINCE: Well?

MINISTER: A messenger on a horse.

PRINCE: Undoubtedly! I did not suppose that he would be on a wild pig.

MINISTER: He went in the direction of Prussia.

BARONESS [*laughing*]: Oh, Piderit, we are in for it now!

PIDERIT [*mechanically*]: Yes, my lady, now we are in for it!

PRINCE [*to the* BARONESS]: What did you have to do with this messenger? There is no finery to bring from Prussia!

BARONESS: Will Your Highness deign to wait? Treysa knows everything.

PRINCE [*to the* MINISTER]: Was the man examined?

MINISTER: He was.

PRINCE: I wish I didn't have to pull every word out of you with forceps, as if I were an obstetrician!

MINISTER: Your Highness, the man had a letter sewn into the lining of his coat. The letter bore the seal of the Baroness.

PRINCE [*rather sharply*]: What could you have had to write of to Prussia, in these critical days?

BARONESS: Do you know, Treysa, that is really quite malicious of you! A moment ago, you were paying me homage as Venus, and now you make me appear as a traitoress.

PRINCE: Well, since you won't speak—the contents, Treysa!

BARONESS: Ah, Piderit, it is all over now!

PIDERIT [*laughing shortly and with difficulty*]: Now it is all over!

MINISTER: Your Highness, unfortunately, I don't know what was in the letter.

PRINCE: What!

BARONESS: Oh, Piderit, I am happy again!

PIDERIT [*in a scarcely audible voice*]: So am I, gracious lady! So am I!

PRINCE: Then the letter was not opened?

MINISTER: No, Your Highness! Unfortunately, it was not! The seal of the Baroness was respected.

PRINCE: Damnable business! The guard on duty shall be punished.

BARONESS: Punished, because he respected me?

PRINCE: Punished, because he disobeyed my command! In these days, only one seal is to be respected—mine!

BARONESS: But if I plead for him? The man did me a courtesy!

PRINCE [*more wildly*]: Then explain yourself.

BARONESS: Explain myself! It was to be a surprise. Wasn't it, Piderit? Tell him that it was to be a surprise!

PIDERIT: Yes, gracious lady, a great surprise!

PRINCE: At least, it is something pretty, Secretary?

PIDERIT: At the service of Your Highness, it is something extraordinarily pretty.

MINISTER: That should not have prevented you from reporting the matter to me, as was your duty!

PIDERIT: Your Excellency, I did not wish to draw upon myself the ill-will of my lady.

PRINCE: You see, Treysa, who really counts here! [*He laughs.*] Secretary, to be able to keep a secret is good. To honour beauty is also good. You have my unaltered good favour. [*He nods merrily to him. To the* BARONESS.] We shall await you in the Japanese room. Come, Treysa!

[*Goes off with* TREYSA *toward the park.*]

BARONESS: Ah, Piderit, how I laughed! We were both nearly locked up as traitors!

PIDERIT: Yes, gracious lady, it was most amusing!

BARONESS: But, my God, what protective measures! What seriousness! A letter is discovered at the bor-

der at Lengenau. It becomes a matter of State! This whole little country is ruled like a room.

PIDERIT: You must consider this whole country as a frame round your picture, my lady. It is just big enough and rich enough to serve that purpose.

BARONESS: Oh, Piderit, how courtly! But with all that, you were not able to bring me my Aubignac.

PIDERIT: Well, he will be waiting for you when you come back from your journey.

BARONESS: From my journey . . . That is really not a journey for a lady!

PIDERIT: But the Prince based his determination upon such extremely gallant reasons!

BARONESS: Yes, he did, Piderit, he did! But do you think that those poor fellows care who waves them good-bye—whether I or some old, drunken hag?

PIDERIT: Poor fellows? What do you mean by calling them poor fellows, my lady? I have been listening among the people. They are actually happy. You know that there is a boy hidden in every man. New experiences tempt them; adventures, the blue ocean, the distant continent, the strange people. One can truly say that the country rejoices!

[FAUCITT *enters from the right.*]

FAUCITT: Madam, will you permit me to have a word with the secretary?

BARONESS: Certainly!

FAUCITT [*to* PIDERIT]: There is something which must be changed in the contract. One of the conditions must not appear.

PIDERIT: It cannot have escaped your notice, Sir Plenpotentiary, that I have not the right to make any changes.

FAUCITT: I am not asking for any changes. What I want is a separate draft.

PIDERIT: I am not authorised to give you that.

FAUCITT: But surely you are sufficiently intelligent to understand that such a paper, signed by me in all the particulars, does not bind the English Crown any the less!

PIDERIT: Then I do not understand . . .

FAUCITT [*with restraint*]: You shall understand! My Minister in London would not dare to place those conditions before the Parliament of England. They would arouse indignation.

PIDERIT: Indignation?

FAUCITT: Don't pretend stupidity, Secretary!

PIDERIT: I am stupid, Sir Plenipotentiary. I cannot imagine how any of the clauses of the contract could possibly give rise to indignation.

FAUCITT: That is a matter of viewpoint. When the first contract of last year became known, quite a storm was raised. The Lords Cavendish, Irnham, and Richmond attacked the Ministry. And now, if these conditions . . .

BARONESS: To what conditions are you referring?

FAUCITT [*pointing his words sharply*]: Know, since you ask, Madam, that the Prince desires that no prisoner, no invalid, no cripple should be returned here before the conclusion of peace.

BARONESS: Not back here? Where, then?

FAUCITT: The Prince wishes these men to die somewhere else, out in the world. They are not to disturb his business here.

PIDERIT: If I may be allowed to express an opinion, I think that is uncommonly sagacious and just on the the part of the Prince.

FAUCITT: That, again, depends upon your point of view. I have nothing to say against it. But there are some hotheads in the English Parliament who would call that scandalous and knavish, and would at once tear up the contract. A separate draft, then! [*To the* BARONESS.] My compliments, my lady!

[FAUCITT *exits.*]

BARONESS: What was that?

PIDERIT [*laughing*]: Nothing that you need to bother about.

BARONESS: These Englishmen . . .

PIDERIT: These Englishmen are pedants, my lady. You yourself have put it aptly. They must needs put their noses in every piece of nonsense.

BARONESS: This is no nonsense. There must be something singular about us, if these strangers find it necessary to tell us our duty!

PIDERIT: Well, how far do you suppose one would get in politics, if one had to follow up every cripple sequestered in the remote corners of the world?

BARONESS: You are disgusting!

PIDERIT: No more disgusting than Nature herself, in all her immensity. She takes no heed of her children.

The apple tree has a hundred thousand blossoms, and ninety-nine thousand die. A thousand little fish are born, and a pike eats nine hundred at a single gulp.

BARONESS [*who has not been listening to him*]: And if the war were to last twenty years?

PIDERIT [*carelessly*]: It probably won't.

BARONES: [*as though she were looking more and more deeply into the abyss*]: Suppose these men go out in the best days of their youth, and come home broken old men, destroyed creatures. . . .

PIDERIT: That must not trouble you.

BARONESS: Piderit, one never thinks! One does not know what a world one lives in!

PIDERIT: My lady, one should not know it! One should live! But let us speak of our affairs. It has happened, unluckily, that of all your commissions, none has been executed. I place the blame on the bad roads.

BARONESS: Tell me, Piderit. . . .

PIDERIT: Yes, my lady?

BARONESS: Who was your father?

PIDERIT [*apparently surprised*]: My father? A peasant.

BARONESS: You have no brothers and sisters?

PIDERIT: Brothers, my lady. Two.

BARONESS: Peasants?

PIDERIT: Peasants.

BARONESS: That is quite strange.

PIDERIT: Strange?

BARONESS: You are a man of the people; your father was of the people; your brothers are of the people. And you [*she points to the contracts*] put that down with a calm conscience?

PIDERIT [*laughing*]: My gracious lady, what should I do? I am a pen-quill. If I become unruly, they will take another.

BARONESS: Nevertheless . . .

PIDERIT: Moreover, I beg you to recall that I am a peasant no longer. Wherein does all this concern me?

BARONESS: Oh, of course . . .

PIDERIT: If you will pardon my impudence, my case is similar to yours, my gracious lady. Though leagues removed, to be sure.

BARONESS: Like mine?

PIDERIT: My lady, once you did me the honour of recalling your own descent in my presence. Would it not be absurd, from the heights which you tread, to look back upon your beginnings, and to feel the fate of your former companions as though it were still your own?

BARONESS [*looks at him drily*]: You are right, Piderit. That would be foolish.

[*Minuet music outside.*]

PIDERIT: Ah, the celebration is beginning!

BARONESS: Does it strike you as probable that the majority of the guests will enjoy it greatly?

PIDERIT (*politely*): As long as you are absent, my lady, certainly they will not.

BARONESS: Let us put gallantries aside! Many will be unhappy.

PIDERIT: There are always people in bad moods.

BARONESS: I fancy that there will be approximately twelve thousand of them, this time.

PIDERIT: That must be endured, my lady, endured with a smile. May I express my opinion, in all modesty? The human race has invented many beautiful words. The people, the home, the family. There is no truth in them. One does not belong to a family; one does not belong to a people. Among men, there exists only one differentiation. There are those who are above, and there are those who remain below!

BARONESS: And you count yourself among those who are above?

PIDERIT: My lady, when I consider my origins—unquestionably!

BARONESS: You are right.

PIDERIT: I am a secretary, is not that so? But I still hold one tiny morsel of power, and I have covered myself warmly with it. Nothing happens to me!

BARONESS: And that is the most important consideration of all!

PIDERIT: Oh, don't speak of it contemptuously! [*Laughs*] I much prefer to sit here at my desk than on some island across the ocean, blind or with one arm.

BARONESS: And nothing of all that can happen to you?

PIDERIT [*laughs*]: To me? No man thinks of it, al-

though I have everything that is necessary: the right age, and health. I remain safe; that is what I call being above.

BARONESS: Those are very plausible ideas, Piderit. You are a clever man. A man like you is naturally of greater value to the Prince than the—what is the price that England is paying for a soldier?

PIDERIT: Fifty taler.

BARONESS: On the hoof?

PIDERIT: What, my lady? Ah, very good! Yes, certainly one can think of it a little as cattle trade—when people are put in a kind of a cage and shipped across the sea, receive stinking food, and, when they have reached the other side, are murdered for a cause of which they understand nothing. Such comparisons are, of course, made by the common folk all over the country.

BARONESS: Is that so?

PIDERIT: Without reason, of course. It is perfect nonsense. In the first place, there is the matter of weapons! Cattle for slaughter don't bear arms. Nobody ever heard of such a thing! Finally, the men take the oath of allegiance. Have you ever seen that ceremony?

BARONESS: No, no.

PIDERIT: It is very solemn. The regiment is formed into a circle: the magistrate reads the oath aloud, and cautions the troops to demean themselves as true, brave, and orderly soldiers. All the men lift

up their right hands and repeat the oath. To speak of cattle in this connection is quite absurd! Cattle are not put under oath.

BARONESS: Still, I fancy you are right. Not to have to submit to all that—that is truly being above!

PIDERIT: Cattle for the slaughter! Ridiculous! When cattle are driven into the slaughter-pen and the doors are shut, none ever returns. Isn't that so? But many will return from America. At least, a few!

BARONESS: Even if not before the treaty of peace!

PIDERIT: No, not before. Luckily! I hope they stay on the other side of the earth for ever!

BARONESS: If only they remain alive! If only they keep their precious blood in their arteries! Oh, now I see it all!

PIDERIT [*as though he does not understand*]: Your remarks are most surprising!

BARONESS: What kind of a State must this be, what kind of a system, which employs men like you as underlings! And I have been standing here, conversing with such a creature! Such a creature has written my letters! Good-bye, Secretary! Live on happily, my "Man Above." [*She laughs*] I hope never to see you again! [*She goes. Just before she has reached the garden door, she pauses and extends her hand.*] My ring!

PIDERIT [*suddenly very quiet*]: That must remain in my hands.

BARONESS: What!

PIDERIT: I shall say that I stole it.

BARONESS: Nonsense!

PIDERIT: I am a doomed man.

BARONESS: Oh, I know that—from this moment on!

PIDERIT: I don't wish to destroy you, along with myself.

BARONESS: You must see the doctor! You are ill!

PIDERIT: The letter to Berlin was sealed with your ring.

BARONESS [*impatiently*]: I know that already. Let us make an end to this!

PIDERIT: And suppose no Aubignac comes . . .

BARONESS: What?

PIDERIT: Suppose an entirely different person comes . . .

BARONESS: A different person?

PIDERIT: One or two days late!

BARONESS: I have had words enough! My ring! [*She stands before* PIDERIT, *her hand outstretched.*]

PIDERIT: I did not carry out your order.

BARONESS: That, too!

PIDERIT: I did not write to Aubignac.

BARONESS: Very well! My ring!

PIDERIT [*after a short pause, in low and emphatic voice*]: But to the King of Prussia!

BARONESS [*with a cry*]: Good God! What did you do? To the King! Piderit! Man!

PIDERIT [*quietly*]: My lady! I wrote to King Frederick, through an intermediary. But the time was too short. I have helped no one, and I am lost!

BARONESS: You dared to do that!

PIDERIT: That was no risk . . . I have two brothers involved.

BARONESS: But all that you have just said! Those terrible things! You were merely jesting?

PIDERIT: Those who are lost can jest as much as they please. You should feel as I do.

BARONESS: I do, Piderit. And I am with you!

PIDERIT: No, you must not be!

BARONESS: You must save yourself! You must escape!

PIDERIT: It is too late to escape.

BARONESS: Do you need money? What do you need? Speak!

PIDERIT: It would be to no avail. Every inch of the border is watched.

BARONESS: Not for the Prince's secretary.

PIDERIT: For him, more than any one else, now.

BARONESS: Then I'll plead for you. I'll throw myself at the Prince's feet.

PIDERIT: You are under suspicion yourself. You would be wiser to report me!

BARONESS: Not for the world!

PIDERITS My gallows would not be any the higher!

BARONESS: Piderit! Almighty God! [*She grasps his hands.*]

PIDERIT: Silence!

[*He has torn himself away. The Minister comes in from the park.*]

MINISTER: My gracious Baroness, I have been sent to look for you. Everybody is waiting. The Prince is astonished.

BARONESS: But, my dear Treysa, at what? Piderit and I are engaged in plotting a new treason! This time, the Sultan is to come, with camels and janissaries!

MINISTER: You are making fun of me, my lady, and I deserve it. But won't you please remember . . .

BARONESS [*laughing*]: All right, Treysa, all right! [*To* PIDERIT.] Good-night, my fellow-plotter!

[*Exeunt, the* BARONESS *and the* MINISTER. PIDERIT *remains standing a moment; then he sits down at his desk and begins to write. He stops, crushes the papers in his hand, throws them to the ground, and lets his head fall to the desk, his fists pressed against his eyes. The door to the park has remained open; through it, the coloured illumination of the fireworks shines into the room. Cries of "Ah!". The minuet music changes to a spirited military march.*]

[*The side door opens. A Prussian Colonel, in a shabby uniform covered with the dust of his journey, steps in.*]

COLONEL: Hello, there!

[PIDERIT *starts. First, he stares at the park door; then he sees the* COLONEL, *but still not clearly. He jumps up, seizes the candelabra, holds it high aloft, and lets the light fall upon the* COLONEL. *He rushes to him and falls at his feet. The candelabra crashes to the floor; the lights go out. There is now only the shifting light of the celebration.*]

PIDERIT [*redeemed, ecstatic, beside himself*]: The Prussian uniform! [*He throws his arms round the officer's knees.*]

COLONEL: The Prussian uniform! The joke is over now!

PIDERIT: The Prussian uniform! The Prussian uniform! Heavens!

COLONEL: Enough of this nonsense! Announce me to the Minister! At once!

PIDERIT: Yes, Colonel! Yes, General! I am going! I'll announce you at once! [*He rises, as if dazed, to his feet.*]

COLONEL: What is the matter with you?

PIDERIT: Nothing! I . . .

COLONEL [*turning him toward the coloured light*]: Who are you?

PIDERIT: I am Secretary Piderit.

COLONEL: Oh, the secretary? You have played a shameless game!

PIDERIT [*weakly*]: Shameless, yes!

COLONEL: You will have your neck stretched, very likely!

PIDERIT: Yes, my General! I am contented!.

COLONEL: You say that now. You will talk in a different tone later.

PIDERIT [*as though abstracted, still blissfully*]: He came in time!

COLONEL: That will not help you. You will have to pay for it!

PIDERIT: I don't care!

COLONEL: An infamous deed is always an infamous deed. You are a traitor!

PIDERIT: Yes!

COLONEL: You are a traitor to your Prince. You have committed high treason!

PIDERIT: Yes, Sir! Yes! With all my heart!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

[FAUCITT, *the* MINISTER, *and the* PRUSSIAN COLONEL *are seated together, at a little distance from one another.*]

MINISTER [*after a silence*]: I fear the moment when it will be necessary to inform His Highness. His Highness is already dressed for the journey.

COLONEL: In that case, His Highness will have to change his clothes.

MINISTER: Now, your credentials!

COLONEL: My presence here constitutes my credentials. You can't possibly believe that I stopped in here while taking a walk!

FAUCITT: We can waive that, Minister. [*To the* COLONEL.] What you bring, then, is a formal "No," Colonel?

COLONEL: Formal and courteous.

MINISTER: Courteous?

COLONEL: The message of my King is as follows: As much as it would please him to accommodate His Majesty, the King of Great Britain, he finds it utterly impossible to permit the passage of German troops bound for America through Prussian territory.

MINISTER: Outright disdain!

FAUCITT: A just expression!

COLONEL: The actual message, word for word.

MINISTER: And the reasons?

COLONEL: There are none.

FAUCITT: We can't negotiate without reasons.

COLONEL: I bear a message. I am not negotiating.

MINISTER: In any case, I trust it will not be asserted that the King forbids the transport on so-called humanitarian considerations!

COLONEL: Nothing will be asserted.

MINISTER: Naturally not, since the King wishes nothing else than that German manhood should be conserved for his own purposes!

COLONEL: If that were so, it is somewhat strange that, at the former prohibitions of the transportations by the King, a veritable storm of joy swept through the whole of Germany.

MINISTER: The people are always shouting.

COLONEL: When you don't throttle them!

MINISTER: And do you intend to repeat these things before His Highness?

COLONEL: If His Highness questions me, why not?

FAUCITT: And does not your master fear complications with the Crown of England?

COLONEL: Apparently not. Otherwise, he would avoid them.

FAUCITT: And he is aware how grossly he violates every conception of gratitude?

COLONEL: Gratitude? That is a strange word in political connections!

FAUCITT: He forgets that he would never have been able to withstand his united enemies for seven years, without England's money.

COLONEL: Which ceased to come at the most crucial moment! And that moment was precisely the one in which England ceased to have need of my sovereign.

FAUCITT: And the monarchical principle, my dear Sir. The King, by his prohibition, is supporting the American rebels.

COLONEL: If he does that, surely he is doing so because he wishes to do exactly that!

FAUCITT: It seems to me that there ought to be such a thing as a solidarity of thrones!

COLONEL: I am afraid that King Frederick is not of a similar opinion. No doubt, his attitude is that such a principle depends upon who is sitting on the throne.

FAUCITT: He will have to bear an enormous responsibility on his shoulders. The voices that assert that the Americans are arming themselves for secession, for a declaration of their complete independence, are increasing.

COLONEL: The declaration has already been made. [*He draws newspapers from the pocket of his uniform coat.*] The newspapers from Berlin! The independence of the United States! Complete rupture with Crown of England! Some ten injustices are recited against her. Would you care to read it. Mr. Faucitt? I present you with the papers.

FAUCITT: I don't wish to read it. The English Crown can do no wrong!

COLONEL [*glances at the paper*]: It says here that the King of England has "plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people." But the most serious accusation is that he has brought in large numbers of foreign mercenaries, to complete the work of death. [*He throws the papers on the table.*]

FAUCITT: Foolish twaddle!

COLONEL: That is the way it is, Faucitt. With those purchased troops by which you planned to hold America, you have lost her!

[PIDERIT *enters from the right.*]

PIDERIT [*very pale, but entirely self-possessed, to the* MINISTER]: I am reporting for service, Your Excellency!

MINISTER [*very ungraciously*]: What do you want?

PIDERIT: Your Excellency ordered me to come at nine o'clock.

MINISTER: You may go. You are not needed. But stop! You can take down the protest.

COLONEL: What is that?

MINISTER: The protest to the protocol, which the princely administration issues against the violent encroachment of the Prussian King.

FAUCITT: Protest, to whom?

MINISTER: To the administration now in session at Regensburg.

FAUCITT: Well, I'll be damned!

COLONEL: And *he* is to put that on record?

MINISTER: Why not?

COLONEL: Why not? That man? This is a good joke!

[*He bursts into laughter, his finger pointed at* PIDERIT. *During his loud laughter, the* PRINCE *enters from the garden, dressed for the journey.*]

[*The* COLONEL, *his back towards the garden, is still laughing as the Prince enters.*]

PRINCE [*in a loud voice*]: Who laughs so rudely?

COLONEL [*turns round and, without haste, takes his hat from his head*]: *I* am laughing.

PRINCE: Who—I? The Prussian uniform? [*Glances from the* COLONEL *to the others.*] Your business at my Court?

COLONEL: Royal messenger from Potsdam! Do you wish to know my mission, Your Highness?

PRINCE: Treysa, do I guess his mission correctly?

MINISTER: Your Highness, I am as though thunderstruck!

PRINCE: That consoles me. [*Suppressing his rage.*] Who has informed the administration?

COLONEL [*shrugs his shoulders*]: Your Highness, I am nothing but a messenger.

PRINCE: Who informed the King?

MINISTER [*with an expression full of meaning*]: Your Highness . . .

PRINCE [*to the* COLONEL]: Sir, what did your former excessive amusement signify?

COLONEL: Your Highness wishes me to speak freely?

PRINCE: Yes.

COLONEL: I was laughing at thought of the intended protest.

PRINCE: Protest?

COLONEL: It is planned to lodge a protest against the prohibition of my King. A protest to the administration in session at Regensburg! Isn't that a sufficient cause for laughter?

PRINCE: No, Colonel! But that protest is unnecessary. I shall not allow my plans to be disturbed by any prohibition.

COLONEL: As you please, Your Highness!

PRINCE: In an hour, I shall myself be on the way with my troops.

COLONEL: Your Highness will not proceed very far.

PRINCE: That remains to be seen.

COLONEL: A Prussian army is what will be seen. It is mobilising at the border.

PRINCE: You will not persuade me to believe that His Majesty would go to war for such a trivial reason.

[*The* COLONEL *shrugs his shoulders.*]

PRINCE: Explain yourself!

COLONEL: If Your Highness so desires! There have been worse and more trivial reasons which have brought on wars.

PRINCE: For example, the purpose of stealing territory, in defiance of solemnly sworn oaths!

COLONEL: I do not understand!

PRINCE: Your King would understand.

COLONEL: Hardly. He is deaf, when he wishes to be.

FAUCITT: Not to the sound of gold, at any rate! He

has always listened with pleasure to the tinkle of England's gold.

COLONEL: Every one pays with what he has. My master paid you with amiability. More than paid you!

PRINCE: You have suggested the right course, Faucitt! [*To the* COLONEL.] What will the Prussian consent cost?

COLONEL: That is a jest, Your Highness!

PRINCE: We offer a quarter of the sum; one hundred and fifty thousand taler for a single word.

COLONEL: Surely you don't expect me to answer?

PRINCE: A third, then. In the interests of England.

COLONEL: And, Your Highness, doubtless also in the interests of your soldiers, who are looking forward to a pleasant excursion on the sea.

PRINCE: Insolence!

COLONEL: Merely one joke for another. For I certainly cannot regard this proposal, which would make my master, Frederick the Second, a party to such a traffic in human flesh, as anything else but a joke!

MINISTER: Are you quite certain, Colonel, that you will be thanked for your "No" in Potsdam?

FAUCITT: *I* am not.

COLONEL: Really, aren't you, Mr. Faucitt? Can you imagine me entering the cabinet of His Majesty, and reporting: "I didn't actually fulfill the orders which you gave me, Your Majesty, but I am bringing you some money!" You have a good imagination!

[*The* BARONESS, *very simply clad, comes in from the park.*]

BARONESS: No one dares to announce it to Your Highness, so I have come to tell you myself. The regiments refuse to march!

PRINCE: So much the better!

BARONESS: If Your Highness will deign to listen! [*She opens the door, and a great noise of clamouring people is heard.*]

PRINCE: They will soon find out! Is the guard ready, Treysa?

MINISTER: Ready to fire. Two rounds, and the comedy in finished. The mutineers have no ammunition.

BARONESS: Nor do they need it! They are attempting no resistance. They are throwing their guns into the river.

PRINCE: The damned blackguards! Let the order for attack be given! [*He turns to leave.*]

BARONESS [*restraining him with a gesture*]: If I may be permitted a suggestion . . .

PRINCE [*impatiently*]: What, am I to wait until the river flows over with expensive rifles?

FAUCITT [*phlegmatically*]: The men have doubtless heard with what ancient models they are equipped. Rifles from the Thirty Years' War!

BARONESS [*to the* PRINCE]: If you were to act without force, Your Highness . . . if you were to go out and announce that no soldier is going to America . . . exactly as if you had freely changed your mind . . .

PRINCE [*glancing at her sharply*]: As though?

BARONESS: Since the people know nothing of the prohibition of the King of Prussia!

PRINCE: Ah, but you know of it?

BARONESS: It would be a great and noble gesture!

PRINCE: I must ask you to tell me what makes you suspect Prussian interference?

BARONESS: But I see the uniform of this gentleman!

PRINCE: And suppose this gentleman had an entirely different reason for being at my Court? Treysa, your suspicions!

COLONEL [*stepping up*]: Your Highness . . .

PRINCE: Colonel, your word is of no importance in this matter. I don't need a witness. [*To the* BARONESS.] Your seal, Madam, convicts you. Consider yourself a prisoner of the State!

PIDERIT [*coming forward*]: Your Highness . . .

PRINCE [*violently*]: Silence!

PIDERIT: *I* sealed the letter.

PRINCE [*with disdain*]: The accomplice refuses to be overlooked!

PIDERIT: The deed was mine alone!

PRINCE: Treysa, take care of this fellow!

MINISTER [*to* PIDERIT]: You could not have used the seal without the knowledge of the Baroness.

PIDERIT: I stole the ring.

BARONESS: That is not true.

PIDERIT [*shows him*]: Here it is.

PRINCE: Honour among thieves! Well, each one will get his share!

PIDERIT: Not honour! What good would it do me to destroy the lady, along with myself?

PRINCE: She is already destroyed. Spare us your drivel.

PIDERIT: Colonel, do you know the intermediary at the Prussian Court, to whom I addressed my letter?

COLONEL: Yes.

PIDERIT [*to* BARONESS] Name him!

[*The* BARONESS *remains silent.*]

PIDERIT [*sharply, to the* BARONESS]: If my letter was written with your knowledge, name this intermediary!

[*The* BARONESS *remains silent.*]

FAUCITT [*looking admiringly at* PIDERIT]: A gentleman! A miracle!

PRINCE [*to* BARONESS]: That is your good fortune! Still, your attitude is apparent! [*With a gesture toward* PIDERIT.] Treysa, put this man in safe-keeping!

MINISTER [*opens the side door, revealing a dark passage*]: Guard! The Secretary is a prisoner!

[PIDERIT *steps out, and the door closes behind him.*]

MINISTER: And now, Your Highness . . .

[*Muffled cries are heard from outside.*]

PRINCE: The time has arrived! Let the guard fire!

MINISTER: Your pardon! It would, perhaps, be advisable to act upon the suggestion of the Baroness . . .

PRINCE: There is no Baroness . . . Fräulein Rapp!

MINISTER: . . . To take into consideration the suggestion of Fräulein Rapp. A prompt gesture of your

own noble free-will would smooth the troubled waters and inspire the people.

[*The* PRINCE *stands, breathing deeply, reflecting, and looking from one person to the other. Suddenly, he strides violently through the park door. The tumult rises for a short interval as the door is opened.*

[*The* MINISTER *follows.*]

[*A short silence.*]

FAUCITT: Madam!

BARONESS: Yes?

FAUCITT: Madam, it is unbelievable that you are not English!

BARONESS: I do not understand.

COLONEL [*laughing*]: In all your life, you have never heard a higher compliment, my gracious lady. To be English means to be perfect. Is that not so, Faucitt?

FAUCITT: To be German means to be incomprehensible. I might travel ten years round this country, and I should never understand its organisation. I think there is a German Emperor?

COLONEL: You think correctly!

FAUCITT: Your master in Potsdam does not seem greatly to fear him.

COLONEL: No one fears him.

FAUCITT: His head bears the Crown of the Holy Roman Empire.

COLONEL: And that is all. Every one of the two hundred Princes does as he pleases.

FAUCITT: Pitiful country!

BARONESS: Pitiful country—that is true!

COLONEL: Pitiful country—of course!

FAUCITT: And for all that, Colonel, you are preventing us from holding the Americans!

COLONEL: I don't follow your logic.

FAUCITT: Not really? And here you have before your eyes an example of what it means to be powerless, to be cut up into pieces, to obey so many masters, to stumble over boundaries at every step, to find everywhere new laws, new barriers, new taxes! It is something big for which England is fighting!

BARONESS: With foreign blood!

FAUCITT: It matters little. One great, United Empire, that spans the ocean! One common law! One tongue, one outlook on life, one breath! Those rebels in America are fools who don't know what is good for them! You do a great wrong, in preventing us from bringing them salvation.

COLONEL: That depends on how you look at it, Faucitt.

FAUCITT: I am leaving. I am going further into Germany. Not a day passes that offers do not come to me from various Princes. All have subjects, as many as we could wish for—and some have lands by which one can reach the sea without passing through Prussian territory.

COLONEL: Very few, Faucitt, very few!

BARONESS: Very few—thank Heaven!

[*A short pause.*]

FAUCITT [*taking leave*]: Madam . . .

COLONEL [*in the same manner*]: Gracious lady . . .

[*The* COLONEL *and* FAUCITT *salute each other, curtly and correctly, and leave in different directions.*]

BARONESS [*gazes straight before her. She reflects, and speaks in a low voice*]: No . . . [*takes a few steps, opens the door to the park, listens, and speaks again*]: All is quiet now! [*Closes the door, stands before* PIDERIT'S *desk, picks up papers mechanically, replaces them, picks up his quill-pen, holds it in her hand a moment, and puts it down. Walks again, stops before the picture of the* PRINCE *and contemplates it, shaking her head lightly. Considers the picture again, more deliberately; then, in a firm voice of determination, cries*]: No, no, no! [*She exits at the right.*]

[*The stage is empty for a moment.*]

[*The park door is thrown open, and the* PRINCE *and* TREYSA *enter. The* PRINCE, *his rage not yet subsided, throws himself into a chair.*]

MINISTER [*after a short silence, in a servile tone*]: Thus Your Highness, by his wise action, has managed everything in the best way possible.

PRINCE: Spare me your stilted phraseology, Treysa! Nothing has been well arranged! Must not I now dismiss the horde?

MINISTER: Yes. That, of course!

PRINCE [*provoked*]: Dismiss them! To their homes and their dung fields!

MINISTER [*shrugs his shoulders in commiseration*]: Yes . . .

PRINCE: A disgrace!

MINISTER: Which can be remedied.

PRINCE: I should like to know how!

MINISTER: Very simply. The money which the twelve thousand should have brought in, is to be taken from the whole population.

PRINCE: New taxes! But there is a constant complaint that the limit has been reached!

MINISTER: Will Your Majesty substantiate the following? In whose mind did the last taxes originate?

PRINCE: Yes, yes, in yours, Treysa! But now?

MINISTER [*confidentially*]: Tax on salt!

PRINCE: Ah!

MINISTER: Taxes on silk, on velvet, on fine cloth!

PRINCE: Bravo! They don't need them!

MINISTER: Tax on all fences!

PRINCE: What!

MINISTER [*confidentially explaining*]: Whoever segregates his property, must pay taxes.

PRINCE: Not bad! It must be understood that, in our realm, the security is so perfect that a fence is an insult to our self-esteem!

MINISTER: Exactly! [*Continuing.*] Tax on living rooms!

PRINCE: But they must squat somewhere!

MINISTER: On superfluous living rooms. Whoever has one more room than he needs, must pay for it until he is blue in the face!

PRINCE [*in high spirits, sitting upon the desk*]: You are a great fellow, Treysa! Are they at least to have no

taxes upon their right to their own skins? Is death to be free?

MINISTER: Death need not necessarily be free! Whoever buries a relative in anything more elaborate than an unpainted wooden box, must pay taxes!

PRINCE: A pity they can't be made to pay as well on the other side!

MINISTER: But they can! Whoever has a mass read for one departed, must pay!

PRINCE: Marvelous, Treysa! Yes, that is what we shall do! At least, that bloated fellow in London will not have anything out of it! For he has seen the last of his American colonies. Don't you think so?

MINISTER: That is quite certain. [*With a gesture toward the paper.*] Would Your Highness care to have me read the Declaration, which the Congress in Philadelphia has proclaimed?

PRINCE: Congress? What is that? What kind of people are they who have signed the rubbish?

MINISTER [*searches through the paper*]: Your Majesty, a great many men of no importance. [*Reads.*] Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin . . .

PRINCE: So, so . . .

MINISTER: Hopkins, Whipple, Hopkinson . . .

PRINCE (*laughs*): What?

MINISTER (*repeats*): Hopkins, Whipple, Hopkinson.

PRINCE: Hop, hop, hop!

MINISTER: Penn, Paca, Ross . . .

PRINCE (*slapping his thigh*): Ross! In German, Horse!

I can well believe that! They will be horses! That is a splendid country! And what else do these horses know?

MINISTER: They give the reasons for their decision.

PRINCE: I am curious to know what those might be.

MINISTER: They proclaim the rights of man.

PRINCE: What sort of rot is that?

MINISTER [*reads*]: That all men are by nature free and possessed of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!

PRINCE [*laughs uproariously*]: Splendid! How like a Sunday School text!

MINISTER [*reads*]: That all power belongs to the people. The rulers are the servants of the people, and are responsible to them.

PRINCE [*still laughing*]: Still better! Marvelous! I am responsible to Mr. Whipple; I am the servant of Mr. Hopkins; I am the valet of Mr. Ross! [*Slaps his thigh again.*]

MINISTER [*reads further*]: That every man has the natural right to defend himself against oppression and violence, with all the means at his command.

PRINCE [*whose mood has turned suddenly from gaiety to ominous quiet*]: Oh, he has, has he? We will show him! Treysa, that fellow!

MINISTER [*not understanding at once*]: Your Highness?

PRINCE: That fellow, I tell you! The Secretary! Bring him here!

[*The* MINISTER *goes to the door at the right. At that moment, the* BARONESS *comes from the park.*]

PRINCE [*to the* BARONESS]: What do you want now? You know our will!

BARONESS: You would not deny me a word?

PRINCE: Treysa, I don't need you any more. Keep that fellow close by. When I ring, have him sent in.

[*The* MINISTER *bows low before the* PRINCE *and backs out, without glancing at the* BARONESS.]

BARONESS [*approaching*]: Your Highness!

PRINCE [*interrupting her promptly*]: You have come to beg for mercy? Spare yourself the trouble!

BARONESS: Mercy honours the one who gives it.

PRINCE: No oratory!

BARONESS: One may deny mercy to the dishonourable. But this man has dared to sacrifice his head.

PRINCE: And for exactly that reason, he shall lose it now!

BARONESS: I pray you, with all my heart . . .

PRINCE: Your pleas cannot move me. The Prince who spares traitors, puts aside his Crown. The man dies! He dies for a sovereign right!

BARONESS: Impossible—since the most sovereign of all Kings relinquishes that right!

PRINCE: You dare to remind us of that!

BARONESS: His death will annul the good effects of your clemency.

PRINCE: Leave me to look to that!

BARONESS: Your renunciation will no longer appear to have arisen from your own free will.

PRINCE: You are exceedingly impudent!

BARONESS: I thought that I had the right . . .

PRINCE: Yesterday, yes. An hour ago, even. But not now!

BARONESS: And my crime?

PRINCE: Not your crime, but your convictions!

BARONESS: What, Your Highness, did this Piderit do?

PRINCE: He revolted!

BARONESS: But not against the Government. Only against your cruel decree.

PRINCE: And with your approval! Really, you have suddenly discovered a prejudice toward the people!

BARONESS: I ought to be forgiven for that, since I am myself sprung of the people.

PRINCE: You should not remind me of that! I heartily regret the moment when, for the first time, I took a companion from that raw, unformed class.

BARONESS [*still without pathos*]: Your Highness, it is yours, also!

PRINCE: Your sentiments, at any rate, have never prevented you from extracting every possible advantage from the system against which you are now inveighing!

BARONESS [*not loudly, and very simply*]: I am a woman!

PRINCE: I despise your cry, Madam! To eat the fruit, but to despise the ground which bears it, is the plebeian way. In order to live happily and fashionably, one must bear a strong heart in one's breast.

BARONESS: Piderit's words!

PRINCE [*with scorn*]: Ah, Piderit's words!

BARONESS: But he used them in derision.

PRINCE [*in a rage*]: In derision! We shall spoil his derision!

[*He rings the bell on the table. The door at the right, which leads into the darkness, opens at once, and out of this darkness comes* PIDERIT, *with bound hands. The door closes behind him.*

PRINCE: Nearer!

[PIDERIT *comes nearer, not in a defiant attitude, but with perfect calm.*]

PRINCE: You know what punishment is to be meted out to you?

PIDERIT: I know the law.

PRINCE: You have shaken the structure upon which my throne stands. Try to justify yourself!

PIDERIT: Talk won't help me. I know that!

PRINCE: Your crime is the greatest one possible. Not only have you betrayed the State, but you have betrayed your own Prince! Not common treason, alone, but the treason of a man under oath! Your reasons?

[PIDERIT *remains silent.*]

PRINCE: Open your mouth!

PIDERIT [*in a low voice*]: Twelve thousand reasons!

PRINCE: Idle talk!

PIDERIT: Two of them! Two brothers of mine among them!

PRINCE: You could have pleaded for them!

PIDERIT: I would not have been listened to.

PRINCE: You had the protection of the Minister. You were in good standing.

[PIDERIT *remains silent.*]

PRINCE: Well?

PIDERIT [*this, and all that follows, very simply*]: There were not only two. There were twelve thousand!

PRINCE: Very well, then! He who revolts against Government and law, must be destroyed!

PIDERIT: He who revolts against violence and the injury of mankind, practices a right!

PRINCE: Since the memory of man, that has been the cry of the scum!

PIDERIT: Since the memory of man, man has acted thus! Thus a whole continent is acting today—there, across the ocean!

PRINCE: A curious animal! The scribbler is marching with world history!

PIDERIT: No, my lord, but world history is marching against you!

COLONEL [*comes in from the park. He salutes and replaces his hat*]: I have come to give notice of my departure.

PRINCE: No one is restraining you! [*Calls him back.*] And yet, Colonel, you might report to your master how we are dealing with his tool! We are in the process of breaking it. [*After a short silence.*] Your punishment, Piderit, is the wheel!

PIDERIT: According to the law!

PRINCE: According to the law! [*With a slight glance at*

the Colonel.] For in our country, the good old laws are still in force! [*A short pause; then*] woven upon the wheel! The executioner will break all your limbs.

PIDERIT: According to the law!

PRINCE: And then, then only—decapitation!

PIDERIT [*softly*]: I shan't feel that any more!

PRINCE: You are not afraid?

PIDERIT [*softly*]: I am very much afraid.

BARONESS [*to the* PRINCE]: Your Highness, I . . .

PRINCE: Keep quiet! You have good reason to be silent!

PIDERIT [*quietly*]: Gracious lady, men fear death for seventy years. I shall have feared it for a shorter time. That is all.

PRINCE [*strikes the bell; the door into the darkness opens*]: Dismissed!

[PIDERIT *goes slowly toward the door.*]

COLONEL [*with determination*]: Piderit, this way! Through this door!

[*He pushes the park door, which opens upon the streaming light of the garden.* PIDERIT *stands still.*]

PRINCE [*vehemently*]: Sir!

COLONEL [*who has remained calm through the entire scene, now says quietly*]: The Secretary will go with me!

PRINCE: The man is crazy! The King has sent me an imbecile!

COLONEL: My orders!

PRINCE: You lie! No prince would so completely fail to recognise the authority of a landlord.

COLONEL: Mine does! [*He draws out a paper.*] Here

are my credentials. For I have credentials, signed and sealed! [*Reads.*] "The Colonel," it says here, "is in duty bound to protect the preventor of this misdeed . . ."

PRINCE [*angrily*]: Enough!

COLONEL [*as though looking carefully to see if he were reading correctly*]: "the preventor of this misdeed—in case he prove an honest man . . ."

PRINCE: Silence!

COLONEL [*undisturbed*]: " . . . and in case his life seems to be in danger."

PRINCE: His King himself is crazy! He might with equal right reign here, lift taxes, abrogate laws . . .

COLONEL: Sell subjects!

PRINCE [*roaring*]: Man!

COLONEL: Sir Prince?

PRINCE: I shall protest!

COLONEL: At the Reichstag, perhaps? That would indeed be a suit of honour!

PRINCE: You shall not take this man away from me!

COLONEL [*in a wheedling tone*]: One, out of twelve thousand!

PRINCE: This fellow goes on the wheel!

COLONEL: On the four wheels of my carriage!

PRINCE: I myself will lock you in the same cell!

COLONEL: Nothing but that will prevent me from carrying out my orders!

PRINCE [*putting out his hand to the bell*]: And what should prevent me?

COLONEL: Nothing. At any rate, nothing more than the three hundred thousand men marching behind me.

PRINCE: An idle threat!

COLONEL: And the possibility that certain of the princely territories which lie like islands in Prussia, may cease to be princely!

PRINCE: Land robbery?

COLONEL: The pretext would be welcome in Potsdam.

PRINCE: [*after a short pause, mastering his anger*]: I shan't offer it!

[*He goes, maintaining his upright carriage, without haste, into the park. The door remains open.*]

[*A short silence.*]

COLONEL [*goes up to* PIDERIT, *loosens his bonds, and steps back. Very courteously*]: Sir, the King offers you the right of domicile, and employment for the State, in Prussia.

PIDERIT: Colonel . . .

COLONEL: Say nothing. You must be dazed.

BARONESS [*going up to* PIDERIT, *and pressing his hand*]: Happy man! You have redeemed your whole life in a single day!

PIDERIT [*softly*]: Ah, my gracious lady . . .

BARONESS [*in a changed voice*]: Colonel, your carriage must certainly afford *four* places?

COLONEL: Ah, bravo! They will be delighted in Prussia!

BARONESS: They would not be delighted at all! Your Prussia is a man's country!

COLONEL: There are exceptions!

BARONESS: Don't be afraid! Where the roads turn to the west, there I shall leave you!

PIDERIT [*softly*]: To the west?

BARONESS: Naturally, Piderit! There lies Paris, and all the pretty cities where our tradesmen live.

PIDERIT [*softly*]: You want to go there?

BARONESS [*laughs*]: Why do you have such a sad face now, Piderit? When you were about to go on the wheel, you were gay!

PIDERIT: And I shall never see you again? . . .

BARONESS: When you were about to go on the wheel, you had almost seen your last of the whole world! [*Looks at him amiably.*] No, no, Piderit! Everyone must know his place!

PIDERIT: And yours? . . .

BARONESS: In those countries where one does not have to haggle for blood like a shopkeeper, in order to enjoy a little life and splendour! When do we leave, Colonel?

COLONEL: As soon as your trunks are ready.

BARONESS: In an hour, then! [*She waves her hand lightly, and departs.*]

PIDERIT: Colonel, I can't go with you.

COLONEL: What? Are you weary of your head?

PIDERIT: I can't go to Prussia.

COLONEL: The opportunity to serve Frederick does not attract you?

PIDERIT: No service at Court attracts me.

COLONEL: Service at Court? King Frederick has no

Court! A place in the administration, in the army . . .

PIDERIT [*quietly*]: Not even in the army! I can't serve any more!

COLONEL: Then you will have to travel far to find your bread!

PIDERIT: That is what I intend to do!

[PIDERIT's *brothers enter from the right, in uniform, but without hats.*]

BROTHERS [*rushing in, loudly*]: Wilhelm! Wilhelm! They say it was you! [*Noticing the* COLONEL, *they stop.*]

PIDERIT: These are my brothers. They were to go.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Yes, we were to go.

COLONEL [*regarding the two*]: Your brother is a brave man!

[*The* BROTHERS *grasp* PIDERIT's *hands, struggling to speak.*]

PIDERIT [*disengaging himself at once*]: Are you ready? I am going!

BROTHERS: We are going with you!

COLONEL [*to* PIDERIT]: Reconsider! There would be room in Prussia for these two. [*Points to the* BROTHERS.] Swamps have been reclaimed, deadland is ready for cultivation. The King needs colonists.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Let us go to Prussia, Wilhelm!

PIDERIT: Still further, brothers, if you wish to go along!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Wherever you may lead us!

PIDERIT [*with some emphasis*]: The road over which

you would have gone, you and all the twelve thousand! Down to the sea, and across the sea!

YOUNGER BROTHER: Wherever you may lead us!

PIDERIT: There is land there, land for cultivation; miles, thousands of miles of it; wide, immense spaces; spaces in which to move oneself about. With our six arms, we shall build a village there!

YOUNGER BROTHER: We shall go with you, Wilhelm!

PIDERIT: There is no master there; only Heaven above, the rain, and the sunshine. Man stands by himself, sustained by his natural rights, equal to equal, and is free! Will you come with me?

BROTHERS: Wherever you may lead us!

COLONEL: Have you horses?

YOUNGER BROTHER: We still have our horses.

COLONEL: Then ride beside my carriage! [*He laughs.*] Assuredly, I am riding back in much finer style than I came!

CURTAIN

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